



PRESS RELEASE

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PHOENIX WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO IDENTITY THEFT AND DEFRAUDING SOCIAL SECURITY PROGRAMS

PHOENIX, ARIZONA -- The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona, and the Office of the Inspector General/Social Security Administration, announced today that on March 7, 2002, **DIANA C. FERGERSON, aka WANDA LEE NEILL-FERGERSON**, age 52, a resident of Phoenix, Arizona, entered a plea of guilty to a five-count Criminal Indictment for identity theft, making false statements on government documents, theft of government property, and defrauding Social Security programs of \$47,593.70. The Criminal Indictment resulted from an investigation conducted by Special Agents from the Phoenix office of the Social Security Administration/Office of Inspector General.

According to the Indictment, **FERGERSON** assumed the identity and Social Security number of her former sister-in-law more than 30 years ago. **FERGERSON** used the identity to secure credit cards, and to apply for and receive Social Security disability benefits and Supplemental Security Income payments from October 1994 until October 2001, when the deception was discovered by Social Security investigators. **FERGERSON** admitted to stealing her former relative's identity and to using the identity to apply for Social Security benefits payments to which she was not entitled. Sentencing before United States District Judge Earl H. Carroll is scheduled for June 3, 2002. **FERGERSON** faces a maximum penalty of imprisonment for not more than fifteen years on the identity theft charge, ten years on the theft of government property

charge, and five years on each of the charges for Social Security fraud and false statements. Each of the five charges carry a possible fine of up to \$250,000.00 in addition to imprisonment, or both.

The investigation that led to the indictment and guilty plea was conducted by Agents from the Phoenix office of the Social Security Administration/Office of Inspector General, and is the result of a joint effort between the Department of Justice, United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona, and the Social Security Administration/Office of the Inspector General, to identify and prosecute identity theft and fraud against Social Security benefit programs.

This case was handled by John K. Webb, Special Assistant United States Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix, Arizona.

CASE NUMBER: CR 01-1080-PHX-EHC

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